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AUTHOR Ransom, Peggy E.; Weisenbach, E. Lynne
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated elementary education students' perceptions after a reading methods course and after a student teaching assignment. Subjects, 90 Ball State University students and 10 University of Indianapolis students, were asked the same three questions after finishing a reading class and after a student teaching assignment. Results indicated that: (1) metacognition and use of context were statistically significant after the reading class in terms of what happens in the students' minds as they read, but only decoding/phonics was significant after student teaching; (2) following the reading class, responses of both groups for using language experience/whole language approach reached significance, and Ball State student responses to using basals and supplementary books reached statistical significance; (3) after student teaching, students responded at a statistical significance level to the teaching of phonics, the teaching comprehension, and using tradebook/library books for teaching; and (4) after the reading class, students responded that they wanted to teach because they desired to work with children and motivate them, but after student teaching, the students responded only to the effect that they had always wanted to teach. Findings suggest that what is taught at university reading classes does influence student perceptions/beliefs, but that those beliefs become less important after completion of a student teaching assignment. Future research might examine the responses of secondary education students, the impact of additional reading courses, the influences of inservice education programs, and relationships between perceptions of teachers and the teachers' effectiveness. (Contains 16 references and 4 tables of data.) (RS)

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PERCEPTIONS OF PRE-SERVICE ELEMENTARY EDUCATION STUDENTS AFTER A READING COURSE AND FOLLOWING STUDENT TEACHING

Dr. Peggy E. Ransom

Ball State University

Dr. E. Lynne Weisenbach

University of Indianapolis

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Perceptions of Pre-Service Elementary Education Students

After a Reading Class and Following Student Teaching

Introduction

The rationale for studying novice teachers of reading is based upon the assumption that through an understanding of their developing belief systems and practices, an improved knowledge base can be derived. From this base implications for reading teacher education can be drawn. (Alvermann, 1990). According to Shulman (1987), codifying the emerging knowledge and actions of inexperienced, as well as experienced, teachers can support a knowledge base that is grounded in what he calls the "wisdom of practice." It is reasonable to suggest that students' perceptions of the reading instruction act could influence their classroom decision making practices.

The research on topics used in teaching reading (comprehension, text structure, etc.) has increased in recent years; however, Alvermann (1990) notes that "reading teacher education has lacked status as a topic in the field of reading research." Alvermann considers one of the major issues for developing research resides within a more extensive look at preservice students. The question then arises regarding the perceptions of reading instruction held by students after a reading class and after student teaching.

The curriculum at most colleges includes a required reading methods course for elementary and secondary students. In the United States 47 states currently mandate an elementary course and 22 states require a secondary methods course (NASDTEC Manual). Reading educators maintain the view that these courses should have some effect upon reading teacher education, but do they? The question arises as to the perceptions/beliefs of students after they are enrolled in a semester beginning reading course compared to those held after they finish student teaching.

Does the reading methods course have an affect on the students' perceptions/beliefs ? Also, what happens to the perception/beliefs of the students after they complete student teaching? Are they affected by the perceptions/beliefs developed in the classroom reading method course? For this study the elementary reading classes and students were used because the teachers desired to be involved.

The objectives of the study were:

1. To compare data (1992-93) from two higher learning institutions; i.e. Ball State University, and the University of Indianapolis.
2. To compare data on students' perceptions after a reading methods course.
3. To compare data on the students' perceptions after a student teaching assignment.
4. To develop research that will add evidence regarding changes in perceptions related to reading instruction, as they evolve in conjunction with specific learning experiences at the university.

Data Source and Methodology

A collaborative research project was developed in the fall of 1991 and finished in the fall of 1993 involving two Indiana Universities, both having undergraduate teacher preparation programs. The Institutions participating in the study were: 1) Ball State University -a comprehensive state supported school that graduates a large number of teacher education candidates annually and 2) the University of Indianapolis, a private school with a liberal arts college and professional schools. The elementary students in the study, at both institutions, had a reading course during the 1991-92 school year. During the 1992-93 academic year the

students completed their student teaching assignments. The majority of students had one semester between completing the reading course and enrolled as a student teacher. In Table 1 it will be noted that Ball State, the larger institution had 90 students at the end of the reading course and 90 students at the end of student teaching, while the University of Indianapolis (a much smaller school) had 14 students. (see Table 1)

(Insert Table 1 about here)

The teacher education programs at the two institutions are similar in that they comply with program standards mandated by the state of Indiana . The reading courses at the two universities have similar course syllabi in regard to content and objectives. The required reading course identified at each university emphasized the utilization of both the knowledge and the processes of reading as well as exposing the students to different methodological approaches that have a research basis. The elementary college methods teachers were willing to be a part of the research, therefore the introductory elementary reading classes were identified at each university as the initial target class wherein the survey was administered.

Three null-hypotheses were used in the study. They were:

1. There will be no difference between the proportion responses of students after a reading class versus the proportion of responses by students after student teaching. The responses were to the question "What happens in your mind when you read?"

2. There will be no difference between the proportion of responses of students after a reading

class versus the proportion of responses by the students after student teaching. The responses were to the question "As an elementary teacher how do you think you will teach reading?"

3. There will be no difference between the proportion of responses of students after a reading class versus the proportion of responses by the students after student teaching. The responses were to the question ""Why are you planning to teach?"

The data used in this report were responses (perceptions) of students after a reading class compared to their perceptions after student teaching. After the students finished a reading methods class (1991-92) data was collected. The students answered three questions, to test the three hypothesis. Students identified themselves by a three digit number. Then after the student teaching experiences, the students were given the same questions to test the three hypothesis. Students again identified themselves with the same three digit number they had used previously.

After all the data had been collected, they were analyzed using the "means of a proportion" method by the statistician, Dr. C. Van Nelson, Ball State University. This procedure compared the responses given by the students at the end of the reading course to the responses given by the students after student teaching. This statistical procedure has allowed the researchers to analyze individual college data, as well as, aggregate data.

Results

The study was initiated at two institutions, Ball State University and the University of Indianapolis. There were 90 students at Ball State University, which is a much larger educational institution than the University of Indianapolis, who had a final 10 students in the study.

There were three null hypotheses in this study to whether or not there was a significant difference between the proportion of responses given by the participants after finishing a reading class versus the proportion of responses given by the students after student teaching. The three null hypotheses were stated : There will be no difference between the proportion responses of students after a reading class versus the proportion of responses by students after student teaching. Each of the three hypothesis had questions for students to answer. They were: 1. "What happens in you mind when you read?"; 2. "As an elementary teacher how do you think you will teach reading?"; and 3. "Why are you planning to teach?" The differences between the proportion of responses given by the participants were tested within the following groups:

1. All students from two Universities.
2. Ball State University undergraduate students.
3. University of Indianapolis undergraduate students.

The hypotheses were tested to be significant at the .05 level of higher. Z values were used from the normal curve. The results of the three null hypotheses in this study follow.

I. Null-Hypothesis: There will be no difference between the proportion responses of students after a reading class versus the proportion of responses by students after student teaching.

Question 1 to the student: "What happens in your mind when you read?"

The categories used for assigning responses from the students were:

-Metacognition - (I try to picture in my mind...)

-Use of Context - (I use the surrounding words to figure out what I don't know)

-Decoding - (I sound out each word)

-Depends on Purpose for Reading - (I read different things different ways)

(Insert TABLE 2 about here)

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1. After the completion of the reading class, students indicated they used, as mental activities for reading, metacognition (.01) and context (.05) to a statistically significant extent.

2. Also, following completion of the reading class , there was a significant change (.05) in the direction of setting a purpose for reading.

3. After completion of student teaching, decoding/phonics became the only significant (.01 level) thinking process of the students.

   a. Ball State University had a class impact on the total results. However, there was no significant change in this category at the University of Indianapolis.

   b. It is assumed that while students did their teaching, they were greatly influenced in the area of decoding/phonics since the college classes were not thought to over emphasize this area.

4. After student teaching there was a larger proportion of responses for setting purposes for reading from the University of Indianapolis students, but it was not statistically significant.

II. Null-Hypothosis: There will be no differences between the proportion of responses ofstudents after a reading class versus the proportion of responses by the students after student teaching.

Question 2 to the student: " As an elementary teacher how do you think you will teach reading?"

The categories used for assigning responses from the students were:

-Use of tradebooks or library books

-Basal (predominately)

-Basals and supplementary materials

-Language experience/whole language approach

-Individualized

-Comprehension

-Phonics

-Other

(Insert TABLE 3 here about here)

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1. There were significantly (.01 level) more responses from students after a reading course toward teaching reading by utilizing language experience/whole language.

2. There were significantly (.01 level) more responses from Ball State University students after student teaching toward teaching comprehension, which influenced the overall responses between Ball State University and the University of Indianapolis.

3. Another significant proportion response (05. level), following student teaching, was to teach using phonics.

4. Individualized teaching was somewhat more important after student teaching, but it was not statistically significant.

5. Again, these overall results were influenced by the Ball State University students and were reflected in the data when analyzed separately, while the changes at the University of Indianapolis were not statistically significant.

III. Null-Hypothesis: There will be no differences in the proportion of responses of students after they have a reading class versus the proportion of responses of students after student teaching.

Question 3 to Students: "Why are you planning to teach?"

The categories used for assigning the responses from students were:

-Always wanted to teach

-Enjoy working with children

-Want to make a difference- Influence society

-Motivation

-Meet the potential of students

-Other

(Insert TABLE 4 about here)

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1. After a reading class there was a larger proportion of responses of students at a significant level (.01) expressing a desire to teach because they loved children.

2. After a reading class there were more responses of students at a significant level (.01)indicating a desire to teach to motivate students.

3. After student teaching the students responded at a larger proportion and at a significant level (.05) they had always wanted to teach.

4. Ball State students responded to "Other" at a significant level (.05) after a reading class, but this was not the case after student teaching.

5. A large proportion of the University of Indianapolis students responded after student teaching that they wanted to teach in order to reach the potential of students, but it was not statistically significant.

Conclusions

The study was developed to analyze students' perceptions after they finished a beginning reading course and then after they completed their student teaching assignments. The results in this study were secured from the students at Ball State University, a large comprehensive state supported school with a large education college and the University of Indianapolis, a smaller college of liberal arts and professional schools.. There were three null-hypotheses used to test whether there was no true difference between the proportions of responses on three questions, given to students after a reading class and then again after students finished student teaching. The hypothesis were tested by using the following three questions with responses from the students:

1. What happens in your mind when you read?

2. As an elementary teacher how do you think you will teach reading?

3. Why are you planning to teach?

The three hypotheses stated there will be no differences between the proportion of responses by students after a reading class compared to responses after student teaching. Students were asked to answer a questions for each of the three hypotheses. The first question to test hypotheses 1 was: "What happens in your mind when you read?". The results from Table 2 indicate metacognition (.05) and use of context (.01) were significant after the reading class, but did not change to that extent after student teaching. After student teaching the only area of significance (.01) was decoding/phonics ("I sound out each word").

The second question asked to test hypotheses two was "As an elementary teacher how do you think you will teach reading?" Following the reading class, the responses of students (see Table 3) were significant (.01) for using language experience/whole language approach. Only the Ball State students responses to utilizing basals and supplementary books were at a statistical significant level (.01) after the reading class. After student teaching, the students responded at a statistical significant level to the teaching of phonics (.05). They also responded at a significant level (.01) to teaching comprehension as well as using tradebook/library books for teaching.

The third question asked to test hypothesis three was, "Why are you planning to teach?" The results are found in Table 4 (page 9). After the reading class, the students responded at a significant level (.01) wanting to teach because they desired to work with children and motivate them. However, after student teaching the students responded at a significant level (.05) only to the effect that they had always wanted to teach.

Also in the third question asked of students (" Why do you want to teach?"), the responses changed after the reading class and then after student teaching. Following a reading

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class, the students wanted to work with and motivate children, while after student teaching the significant answer change was "I have always wanted to teach."

The students also had different ideas regarding what happens in their minds when they read. They selected metacognition and setting a purpose for reading after completing a reading class. After the student teaching experience, the students then disclosed a different pattern in their minds (more often recognizing decoding or using phonics while they read).

Zeichner & Liston (1987) argue that the goal of field based experiences should be the development of reflective teachers. They also stresses that an inquiry oriented curriculum will foster a critical orientation toward teaching and the context surrounding it. The study reported herein indicates that the reading curriculum of two universities contributes to developing reflective teachers as a result of the reading methods class. But then, the changes might imply that reflective thinking diminishes when students finish their student teaching experience.

The study is important, because it reveals that what is taught in the university reading classes does influence student perceptions/beliefs at the end of the class. However after they finish their student teaching experience, the perceptions/beliefs developed in the reading class become less important. It supports what many college faculty have suspected. The results of this study now confirm the college professors' fears that change manifested at the end of reading methodology classes are not as persistent or permanent as desired.

Students are influenced by the classroom teacher and by other teachers. Their perceptions/ beliefs are not strong enough to permit them to continue them in and after the student teaching field experience. The study supports Zeichner and Tabachnick (1981) suggestion that the influence of teacher education is "washed out" by teachers' experience in schools.

This is a challenge to teacher educators, especially in the field of reading. Reading courses are having some effect on the perceptions/beliefs of students. The question now is: how can educators assist students in utilizing and retaining the positive perceptions/beliefs they develop in a reading class so they survive through the student teaching field experience?

Overall the study indicates that students leave a reading class with open minds concerning different approaches in teaching reading (language experience/whole language, individualized), but after student teaching they respond to different approaches to the teaching of reading. Phonics and comprehension are frequently noted as most important after the student teaching experience.

Recommendations

It is recommended that additional research be designed and carried out to study:

1. The responses of secondary students, after a reading class and then after student teaching, compared to those of elementary students reported above.

2. The impact of additional reading courses (diagnostic or corrective reading) on the perceptions of those enrolled. (Differences in response could be examined if some pursued this course prior to student teaching and another group were enrolled after student teaching.

3. The influence of inservice education programs in the teaching of reading. Perceptions held by teachers who participate in opportunities to explore reading instruction through inservice sessions offered by their school districts could be compared with teachers who do not participate (or in districts where these opportunities are not provided).

4. Any differences in perceptions held by teachers who pursue graduate classes in reading education. Where this choice is optional it would be helpful to identify the

perceptions held at the beginning graduate classes in reading, then after one, two, three or more courses at advanced levels.

5. The relationships between perceptions held by teachers and the effectiveness of their teaching of reading as revealed by pupil progress. While standardized test scores might be used, one might also look at the amount of reading done by pupils, amount of writing produced by pupils, use of school or public library facilities and a wide array of other indicators which could be related to effectiveness of reading instruction.

6. The validity of the assumptiion that certain perceptions are associated with specific outcomes in pupil performance. If reading education continues to maintain convictions regarding the significance of teacher perceptions it should be able to show more precisely how these perceptions influence their teaching and the performance of their pupils.

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Table 1

Number of Students in the Study

	BSU	Univ. of Indianapolis	TOTALS
After a reading class	90	14	104
After student teaching	90	10	100

Table 2

Student Responses to "What Happens In Your Mind When You Read?"

	All	BSU	Univ. of Ind.
Metacognition	2.76**	2.47*	1.70
Context	2.54*	2.67**	.80
Decoding	-4.46**	-3.87**	1.84
Purpose	.52	1.47	-1.85
Other	1.49	1.28	.79

**Significant at .01 +Bigger proportion after a reading class than after student teaching
* Significant at .05 -Bigger proportion after student teaching than after a reading class
Z Values at the normal curve

Table 3

Student Responses to "How Will You Teach Reading?"

	All	BSU	Univ. of Ind.
Trade/Library Books	-2.60**	-3.63*	1.72
Basal	.78	1.06	.94
Basal+Suppl.	.00	3.10**	.00
LangExp/Whole Lang	5.13**	5.31**	1.03
Individualized	-1.04	- .33	-1.84
Compre.	-3.79**	-3.27**	.00
Phonics	-2.49*	-2.43*	- .43
Other	1.36	.51	1.31

**Significant at .01 +Bigger proportion after a reading class than after student teaching
* Significant at .05 -Bigger proportion after student teaching than after a reading class
Z Values at the normal curve

Table 4

Student Responses to "Why Are You Planning to Teach?"

	All	BSU	Univ. of Ind.
Teach	-2.26*	-1.51*	.00
Children	3.72**	3.00**	1.33
Influ. Society	- .12	.29	- .63
Motivation	3.02**	2.98**	1.45
Potential	1.09	1.20	-1.78
Other	1.74	2.06*	.00

**Significant at .01
* Significant at .05

+Bigger proportion after a reading class than after student teaching
-Bigger proportion after student teaching than after a reading class
Z Values at the normal curve